



Highlights of [GAO-03-946](#), a report to congressional requesters

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

Strategic Workforce Planning Can Help USAID Address Current and Future Challenges

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) oversees humanitarian and economic assistance—an integral part of the U.S. global security strategy—to more than 160 countries. GAO recommended in 1993 that USAID develop a comprehensive workforce plan; however, human capital management continues to be a high-risk area for the agency.

GAO was asked to examine how changes in USAID’s workforce over the past 10 years have affected the agency’s ability to deliver foreign aid and to assess its progress in implementing a strategic workforce planning system.

What GAO Recommends

To help USAID plan for changes in its workforce and continue operations in an uncertain environment, we recommend that the USAID Administrator develop and institutionalize a strategic workforce planning and management system that takes advantage of strategic workforce planning principles.

USAID noted that our report captured its complex workforce issues and agreed with our findings and recommendations. USAID also referred to a recently formed team that will carry out a comprehensive workforce analysis and planning effort to identify and address its workforce needs.

What GAO Found

USAID has evolved from an agency in which U.S. direct-hire staff directly implemented development projects to one in which U.S. direct-hire staff oversee the activities of contractors and grantees. Since 1992, the number of USAID U.S. direct-hire staff declined by 37 percent, but the number of countries with USAID programs almost doubled and, over the last 2 years, program funding increased more than 50 percent. As a result of these and other changes in its workforce and its mostly ad-hoc approach to workforce planning, USAID faces several human capital vulnerabilities. For example, attrition of experienced foreign service officers and inadequate training and mentoring have sometimes led to the deployment of staff who lack essential skills and experience. The agency also lacks a “surge capacity” to respond to evolving foreign policy priorities and emerging crises. With fewer and less experienced staff managing more programs in more countries, USAID’s ability to oversee the delivery of foreign assistance is becoming increasingly difficult.

USAID has taken steps toward developing a workforce planning and human capital management system that should enable the agency to meet its challenges and achieve its mission in response to the President’s Management Agenda, but it needs to do more. For example, USAID has begun its workforce analysis but it has not yet conducted a comprehensive assessment of the skills and competencies of its current workforce and has not yet included its civil service and contracted employees in its workforce planning efforts. Because USAID has not adopted a strategic approach to workforce planning, it cannot ensure that it has addressed its workforce challenges appropriately and identified the right skill mix to carry out its assistance programs.

USAID U.S. Direct-Hire Presence, Fiscal Years 1992 and 2002

USAID U.S. direct hires	1992	2002	Percentage change
Total number	3,163	1,985	(37)
Number assigned overseas	1,082	631	(42)
Number of countries receiving USAID assistance with U.S. direct-hire presence	66	71	7
Number of countries receiving USAID assistance with no U.S. direct-hire presence	16	88	450

Source: GAO analysis of USAID data.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-946.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4268 or FordJ@gao.gov.